

THE YEAR ENDS WITH MORE CONFLICTS THAN WHEN IT BEGAN

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The risks of the so-called “geopolitical conflicts” extend in global terms, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine is twenty-one months old, with a stagnation of relevant military operations. As the head of the Ukrainian Forces said, the war with Russia is in a “stalemate.” That is to say, neither of the two forces is in a position to defeat the other in the coming months. At the crossing of the Dnieper River, the Ukrainians have seized a small tactical victory that has served propaganda purposes and ruled out the signs of fatigue and tiredness that were mentioned by both President Volodimir Zelensky and his top military leader in the first days of November. In recent days, the US Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Defense of Germany successively visited Kyiv to ratify NATO's military support for the Ukrainian cause. On December 21, winter begins in the northern hemisphere. This will imply, in addition to the cold, some snow and mud that will prevent operations that could be decisive until the middle of next year. A new Russian offensive is expected against Ukraine's energy infrastructure, with the intention of making the effect of winter on the population harsher. The UN reported in November that the number of Ukrainian civilians killed has reached ten thousand. It is not such a high figure considering the magnitude of the operations that have been carried out and the military casualties on both sides, which are in the hundreds of thousands. As for the Russian economy, it ends the year strong and with a GDP growth exceeding 2%. Not only is it larger than that of Europe, but it is similar to that of the United States, despite the war.

As for the war in Gaza, it is entering its seventh week, with the prospect of a first truce after intense fighting. The Egyptian and Qatari negotiations between the Israelis and Hamas have allowed a four-day truce, during which hundreds of trucks with various types of supplies are expected to enter from Egypt. It would be the first significant humanitarian aid shipment since Israeli forces laid siege to the Gaza Strip more than a month ago. As of October 7, approximately 2.3 million inhabitants lived in Gaza. A vast majority of those who lived in the northern area moved to the south at the request of the Israeli government, which began its attack on that area of the territory, targeting the capital of Gaza as its

main target, where almost half of the Palestinian population lived. Control over this city has been obtained by Israeli forces, who reportedly suffered hundreds of casualties, but without precise information about their number. But the top leaders of Hamas would not have been found in the Palestinian capital and would be found in the south. This could move the epicenter of the Israeli offensive to the part of the Strip where the population that moved south has been concentrated. The fighting over hospitals, both in the north and south, carries a significant political cost for Israel internationally. According to Hamas figures validated by the World Health Organization, the dead Palestinians would exceed fifteen thousand, most of them women and children, which has generated repeated alerts from Unicef. They represent twelve times more than the Israelis killed in the Hamas terrorist attack. The civilian deaths in Gaza, in turn, are 50% higher than those mentioned in Ukraine. The hostage exchange - Israel gives up one hundred and fifty Palestinian prisoners for fifty Israeli hostages, all of them women and children - marks a path that can continue, but without ending the war.

But the conflict continues to spread beyond Israel and the Gaza Strip. The sea front has been opened in military terms. After the occupation of the most important port in Gaza by Israeli forces, the pro-Iranian Houthi militia from Yemen, in a commando operation, took a ship owned by an Israeli in the Red Sea, while underway. This implies putting at risk the control over an international maritime passage through which an important part of the oil that is exported in global terms passes. In the West Bank, the other portion of Palestinian territory that borders Israel, tension does not subside. Palestinians killed in incidents with settlers and Israeli soldiers number in the hundreds. The possibility of the Palestinian Authority that governs the West Bank occupied by Israel including its administrative government over Gaza in a diplomatic solution is receding. Fighting between the pro-Iranian Hezbollah militia from Lebanon and Israeli forces does not stop. American fighting in retaliation for attacks on its troops stationed in Syria and Iraq by pro-Iranian militias continues and even increases. Iran remains without openly intervening in the conflict, but maintains a defiant attitude towards the United States and Israel. In the diplomatic field, Indonesia, the non-Arab Muslim country with the largest population, has begun to play a diplomatic role in the Gaza conflict, when the hospital it maintains in the north of the region was bombed. On November 20, the expanded BRICS group held an extraordinary virtual Summit to discuss the

situation in Gaza. The five full members participated (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and also the six countries invited to belong to it: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and Argentina. They only agreed to call for an immediate ceasefire.

Meanwhile, geopolitical tension in China's maritime environment remains. In the South Sea of the Asian power, incidents between Chinese and Philippine ships with support from the US Navy continue, and the Taiwan question does not escalate, but is perceived by both Washington and Beijing as a potential conflict. But North Korea is the most immediate danger. On November 21, it launched a spy satellite into orbit, which is its third attempt of the year - the previous ones failed - confirming its decision to build a space surveillance system. The UN has prohibited it from carrying out this type of launches, considering that they are tests to advance missile technology. The Biden Administration urged President Kim Jong-un to return to the negotiating table and warned him that "he will pay the consequences" if he continues to violate the international organization's Security Council resolutions. For its part, the Japanese government issued an anti-missile alert in Okinawa, where one of the country's two US military bases is located, so that the population has underground shelters planned in case of attack. In turn, the South Korean Armed Forces reported that they remain on high alert and in permanent coordination with the US and Japanese authorities. Seoul's intelligence services revealed that the North Korean missile project is receiving Russian technological help in exchange for North Korea's ammunition supply.

In conclusion: the war in Ukraine is twenty-one months into a relative stagnation and global geopolitical tensions are increasing. The truce achieved in the Gaza Strip shows a margin for diplomatic action, but it can hardly stop the war. The conflict continues to spread regionally and the tensions in the Red Sea make it evident. Finally, in the Far East, North Korea appears as an imminent threat, which has generated alerts from Washington, Tokyo and Seoul.